

Review of Ella Young's 'Following in Darwin's footsteps in the Galapagos Islands' 28th Oct 2021

Ella had kindly offered to present this talk when she heard that I had booked Dr James Taylor with his 'Voyage of the Beagle' for our monthly meeting in the Pavilion on 14th October. So this was a very timely follow up to Dr Taylor's talk which Ella did very well.

We were taken back to Charles Darwin's childhood and his days as a student and learnt that Darwin studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh Medical School but did not complete his studies. He did though complete his Bachelor's Degree in Theology at Cambridge. However, his interests lay elsewhere and he joined HMS Beagle as a naturalist visiting the Galapagos for five weeks.

Ella had made the very long journey to the Galapagos in 2006 and was excited to see the different



islands and some of their species which she showed us through her photos. Darwin's visit in 1835, helped him confirm his theory of evolution that was published in 'On the Origin of Species in 1859'. Amongst his discoveries were what became known as Darwin's finches. In the never ending world of evolution Ella showed us the Vampire Finch, as its name implies a parasitic bird that drinks the blood of other birds such as the Boobies.



We had expected to see the famous giant tortoises and were not disappointed as we were shown a number of Ella's photos including one of their tour guide alongside a tortoise which gave us a picture of their colossal size. The tortoises are some of the longest living animals in the world living to over 100 years old. Sadly of the different species of tortoises that Darwin saw some are now extinct and others are endangered and indeed critically endangered.

It is always good when talks prompt discussion and questions as Ella's did with lots for us to think about including the ethics of long distance travel to vulnerable sites and what can be done about invasive species. We also wondered how recent the last volcanic eruption was <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-volcano-erupts-ecologically-sensitive-galapagos.html> (Was this the latest?) and so it was that we ended the morning having been well informed and inspired by Ella with topics that we were sure we would visit again. There will certainly be lots of opportunity for further discussion at our 'Coffee and Chat' sessions on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Thursday mornings in the month. Onwards and upwards.

Review by Christine Chittock, Chair and Speakers' Coordinator

Photos courtesy of Ella Young